

ON THE PROFESSION

Introduction

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Universities across North America are feeling the impact of the economic crisis that has affected the world as of 2008, and as all readers of the *Forum* will be aware, Latin American Studies Programs are not immune from the fiscal pressures that are spawning hiring freezes, increased teaching and administrative loads, and cutbacks in discretionary spending. Pessimism and uncertainty abound, but evidence suggests that the situation varies across different types of institutions. As a general rule, campuses that are highly dependent on endowment income are cutting back on expenditures as their investment portfolios sink in tandem with stock markets, whereas more tuition-driven schools are experiencing less drastic pressures on budgets. Most affected by the current economic turmoil are universities and colleges that depend heavily on funding from state governments, whose coffers are suffering from declining tax revenues at the same time that they face growing demands to fund social programs that become ever more necessary with the dramatic expansion in unemployment, hunger and homelessness. Federal government support for education is slated to expand significantly during the coming years, to be sure, but little of this investment will reach Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at the tertiary level. Tough times are likely to endure for several years to come.

In this context, we thought it would be timely to share with the membership the perspectives of colleagues who direct Latin American Studies Centers in various North American institutions. Thus, *On the Profession* in this issue features brief essays by Latin Americanists at two of the leading programs in U.S. public universities, one from a liberal arts college, and another from a mid-sized state school. The experiences of this small sample are not necessarily typical, but they testify to the degree to which financial pressures are impacting centers in distinct settings. While we were able to include essays only from the United States, I might add that the impact of public sector budget cuts is being felt strongly in Canada as well. In my own program, in Vancouver, cuts in the Provincial budget have forced a hiring freeze that has prevented us from replacing retiring faculty. Funds are not even sufficient to cover the gaps in teaching created by unanticipated medical and parental leaves. Graduate student funding is being protected, and as a strategic priority of the University ours is among the few units on campus that have been exempted from cuts in operating and program budgets. Whether we are able to remain in such a privileged position during 2010 and beyond will depend in large measure on the fortunes of the Provincial economy. ■